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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ FEB LIMA 3224
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 2786
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 8743
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 3830
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1934
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3431
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
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SUBJECT: WEEKLY ELECTION ROUNDUP

REF: A. BOGOTA 849 (NOTAL)

[¶](#)B. BOGOTA 898

[¶](#)1. (U) Election updates for the week of January 30 - February 5.

[¶](#)2. (C) More Expulsions For Paramilitary Ties: Colombia Democratica Party leader and Senator Mario Uribe (President Uribe's cousin) announced the expulsion from his party of Rocio Arias and Leonora Pineda on February 2. Colombia Democratica accepted both women late last year after they were denied membership in both the "U" Party and Cambio Radical. Both Representatives, elected from areas under AUC control in 2002, are spokespersons for the paramilitaries and are widely suspected of financial and personal ties to them. Pineda, a major vote getter in 2002, has reportedly been offered the top spot on the Citizens Convergence House list. Arias, who is running for Senate, spent the weekend looking for a new party, but reportedly has been rejected by seven, including Colombia Viva, which accepted Senator Dieb Maloof after his expulsion from the "U" Party two weeks ago. Both Arias and Pineda blame their expulsion from Colombia Democratica on U.S. pressure and Senator Uribe's desire to protect his U.S. visa after a week of false rumors about changes in U.S. visa policy. At least one party leader expects the "expulsados" to be elected, and present a new opposition bloc to Uribe.

[¶](#)3. (C) Antonio Navarro's Temporary Withdrawal from Presidential Race: Polo Democratico Alternativo Presidential candidate and current Senator Antonio Navarro announced his withdrawal from the presidential race, apparently leaving the party nomination to Senator Carlos Gaviria. Navarro's decision not to run was reportedly the result of concerns about the Party's leftward movement and his recent drop in the Polo Party primary polls (Ref B), from 52 to 37 percent. Some Polo members said Navarro's departure was, in fact, a publicity stunt. In any event, he has returned to the race as a means of "uniting the party." Polo's continued public gnashing of teeth regarding its platform and its failure to announce its Senate list until the last possible day may just be growing pains, or it could be a struggle between moderate

and far wings of the Party. This week's events, however, highlight that the Party still lacks a clear leader, vision, and strategy acceptable to a large slice of the electorate -- serious handicaps for a party that wants a good showing in 2006 to lay the ground work for a real shot at the presidency in 2010.

¶4. (C) Conservative Party's Impossible Dream: Conservative Party leaders say they have a multi-year strategy aimed at taking back the Presidency in 2010. The first step is to win 25-30 seats in the Senate this year. Polls show Conservatives lagging behind the Liberals in the Senate race, but leaders say polling doesn't capture the national picture because of its urban focus. They say the Conservative Party is doing well in rural areas, as evidenced by gains in the number of Conservative Mayors and City Council Members in the 2003 local elections and the 3 million votes cast in the Party's November primary. The Conservatives say they support President Uribe for re-election because his agenda is aligned with theirs. They claim to eschew the kind of personality politics practiced by the Liberal and Polo Parties, but the fact is that there is no next generation of Conservative leaders ready to challenge for the Presidency now or in 2010.

¶5. (SBU) Campaigns Focused on Process: With six weeks to the Congressional elections, campaigns remain focused on the process -- who's on what list, what's the latest potential infraction of the Electoral Guarantees Law. Serious issues like the peace process, poverty, displacement, fumigation, and the Free Trade Agreement with the United States seem to have been lost in the technical fray, perhaps an indication of how little the differences among the major parties are.

¶6. (SBU) Uribe's Approval Rating Over 70 Percent: On February 2, Gallup Colombia released the results of its latest poll, taken January 27-30, showing President Uribe's approval rating has jumped three points, to 72 percent, since November 2005. Colombians are more concerned about security, President Uribe's strong point, and less worried about economic issues than they were two months ago. These results are consistent with polls showing Uribe has the support of more than 50% of likely voters needed to win in the first round of presidential elections in May. The popularity of Uribe's policies helps to explain the focus on process noted in para 6.

¶7. (C) Alvaro Leyva's FARC Promises: Calling himself the "Candidate of Peace," former Minister of Mines Alvaro Leyva has launched his presidential campaign. Long suspected of FARC ties, Leyva promises, if elected, to successfully conclude a peace process with the forty-year old guerrilla movement in six months. Leyva, who is running under the National Reconciliation Movement banner, is widely regarded as erratic. He has not yet revealed his plan or overall platform.

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